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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

*Memorandum*



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600  
28 March 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
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28 March 1965

HIGHLIGHTS

Chinese Communist Foreign Minister Chen Yi has formalized Peiping's offer, initially contained in a party daily editorial of 25 March, to provide aid to the Viet Cong. In a note sent today to the North Vietnamese foreign minister, Chen Yi pledged the South Vietnamese people all necessary aid, including men if required. Peiping's contingent pledge of manpower appears intended at least in part to discourage the further introduction of US combat troops in South Vietnam. Soviet spokesmen both at home and abroad are continuing their attempts to generate pressures on the US to moderate its policy in Vietnam.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:  
The Viet Cong continue to emphasize small-scale harassment, terrorism, and sabotage (Paras. 2 and 3). Government operational activity has increased slightly, but no significant results have been reported (Para. 4).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:  
Premier Quat is again concerned over the possibility of a coup against him, citing rumors that General "Big" Minh may be organizing a coalition of senior officers to overthrow the government. However, there is little other evidence at the present time to indicate a coup attempt is in the offing (Paras. 1-3).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:  
Weather continues to delay planned air strikes. The British consul in Hanoi does not believe that the air strikes to date have had a significant impact on the Hanoi regime (Para. 2). He notes that there is little civil defense activity in Hanoi and has seen no evidence of Soviet or Chinese troops there or of Soviet and Chinese arms (Paras 3 and 4).

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V. Communist Political Developments: Peiping's foreign minister has formalized a previous offer of men and material to the Viet Cong in a note to the DRV foreign minister (Paras 1 and 2). Soviet spokesmen continue to reflect Moscow's concern over the developing situation (Para. 3). Pyongyang is giving heavy propaganda coverage to its pledge of aid and assistance to the Viet Cong (Para. 6).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Viet Cong military activity continues to be composed mainly of small-scale harassment, terrorism and sabotage. Government activity has increased slightly, but no significant results have been reported.

2. MACV's military report for 26 March listed 96 Viet Cong - initiated incidents, ten of them occurring during the reporting period. This total was considerably higher than has been noted in recent days; however, the MACV report for 27 March shows a reduction to 63 incidents, a figure more in accord with current trends.

3. Representative Viet Cong actions reported on these two days included a small-scale attack on an outpost defending a district town in Vinh Long Province, harassment of rail and road bridges in Quang Nam Province, and widely scattered harassment of New Life Hamlets and government outposts.

4. Nineteen government operations of battalion size or larger were reported in progress on 26 March, and 20 on 27 March. Small-unit actions for 26 March totaled 2,294, of which only 11 resulted in contact with the Viet Cong. Figures for 27 March were 1,943 and 8, respectively.

5. Forty Claymore mines were accidentally set off when lightning struck a protective fence at a US Special Forces camp in Pleiku Province yesterday. Fourteen were killed and 74 wounded, including one US Special Forces enlisted adviser.

6. At Da Nang a Vietnamese Al-H Skyraider carrying a full load of ordnance today crashed into a US C-123 transport aircraft. Both aircraft were destroyed and the Vietnamese pilot of the Skyraider killed. An American Marine Corps captain was killed today when his H-34 helicopter was shot down by Communist fire south of Da Nang.

## II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Premier Quat is reported to have voiced new concern over the possibility of a coup attempt against his government. On 26 March Quat is said to have told Buddhist leader Tri Quang that he was concerned over rumors of coup plotting by a coalition of leaders of the abortive 19 February coup, Catholic generals on the Armed Forces Council, and several other generals--including General "Big" Minh--who are scheduled to be retired on 1 April. Quat suspects that "Big" Minh, still in Bangkok, is the ringleader of the alleged plot, which would also be aimed at General Thi of I Corps and General Ky, the Air Force chief.

2. General Dong, commander of troops in the Saigon area, has also heard rumors that "Big" Minh was planning an early comeback attempt, but he is inclined to discount them. Dong indicated, moreover, that the Armed Forces Council would stand by its decision to retire Minh and several other generals by 1 April.

3. [redacted] there is no other evidence at the present time to indicate that a coup attempt is in the offing.

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4. The Armed Forces Council reportedly met on 26 March to review the political implications of the fact that the three top military posts are held by Catholics: General "Little" Minh, armed forces commander; General Thieu, minister of defense; and General Cao, chairman of the Joint General Staff. After being assured by General Ky that the Buddhists had no objections, the Council decided to make no changes.

5. A moderate student leader at Saigon University has claimed that the bombings of North Vietnam have had a salutary effect on Saigon students. He stated that students finally realize that Vietnam is fighting a war and that they are thus less interested in creating political disturbances. As

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evidence of the favorable influence of the air strikes, the source cited the recent election of moderates to head the General Association of Saigon Students. He noted that last year this student organization had been misused by political extremists who had dominated the leadership.

III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Weather conditions are continuing to delay planned air strikes.

2. According to the British consul in Hanoi, who is currently visiting Saigon, the air strikes as they have been conducted to date have had no significant impact on the Hanoi regime. He does not believe that the strikes will make a real impression until they start hitting the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

3. He noted that there had been little increase in civil defense activities. Some street trenches are being dug but not many, and there is no concerted effort to build air raid shelters. He believed that a recent air raid exercise held in Hanoi was for the purpose of dramatizing the situation and to demonstrate the efficiency and volume of antiaircraft artillery around the city. The atmosphere in Hanoi is generally as it was, although the regime is attempting to engender some spirit among the still largely unconcerned young people by making them engage in shooting and grenade-throwing practice. Older people appear to be more worried.

4. The consul stated that he had seen no evidence of Soviet or Chinese arms and had seen no Soviet or Chinese soldiers in Hanoi. He had seen some crates about the size of a desk with Soviet markings, but the contents were not known.

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## V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Chinese Communist Foreign Minister Chen Yi in a note to the North Vietnamese foreign minister on 28 March has formalized Peiping's offer of 25 March to aid the Viet Cong. The wording in Chen's note and that of the 25 March party daily editorial are almost identical. Chen pledges that "the Chinese people will exert every effort" to send the South Vietnamese people "the necessary material aid, including arms and all other war materiel, and stand ready to dispatch their men to fight shoulder to shoulder with the South Vietnamese people whenever the latter so require."

2. Peiping's contingent pledge of manpower is believed to reflect efforts to pressure the US Government into halting the further introduction of US combat forces into Vietnam. The 22 March Viet Cong statement indicated that they would call for "foreign troops" if the US continues to send its own forces to Vietnam and further expands the war.

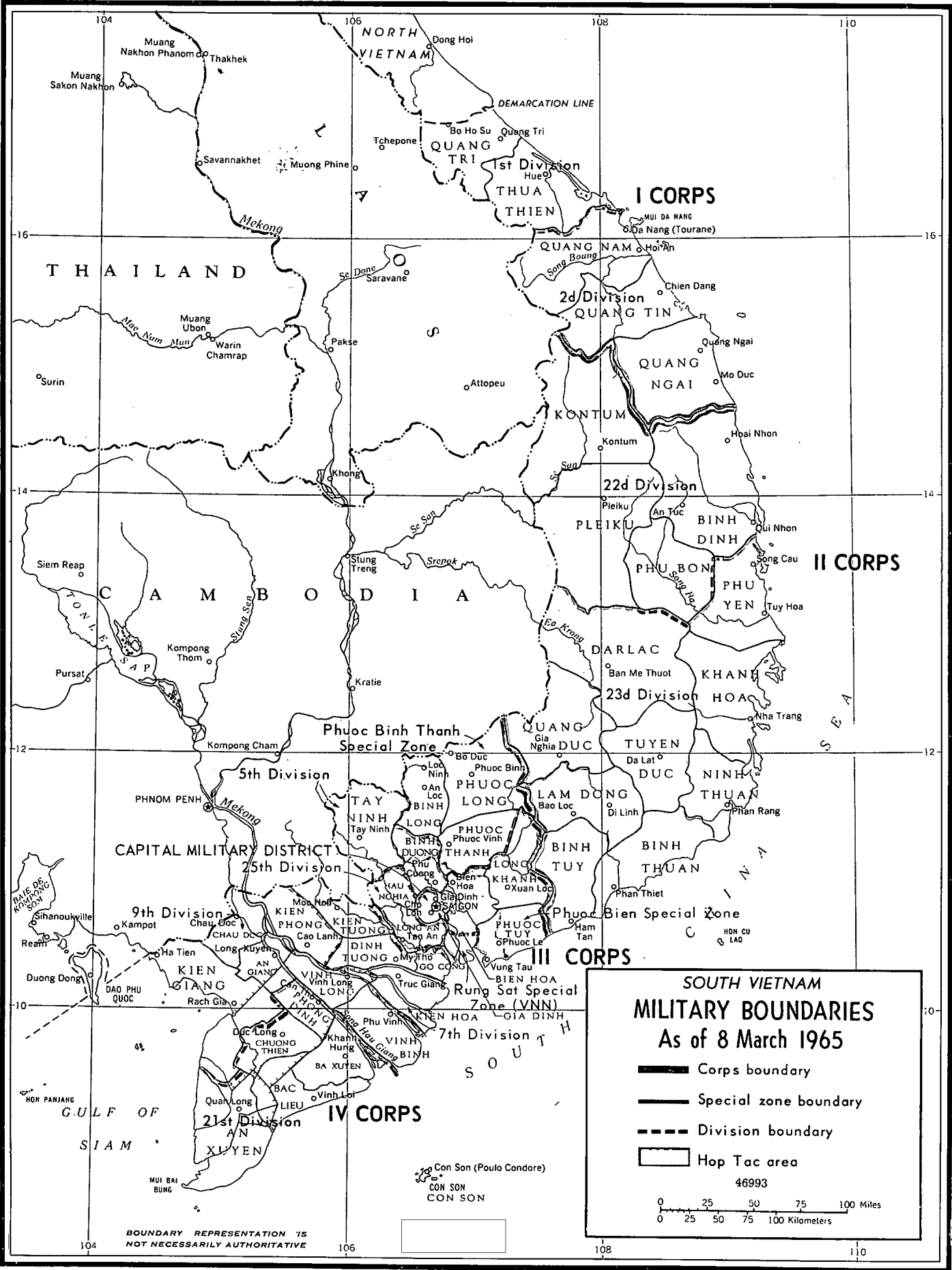
3. Soviet spokesmen continue to underscore Moscow's uneasiness and concern over the developing situation. In a mid-March conversation with an Indian diplomat in Moscow, a Soviet Foreign Ministry official reportedly took a hard line in stressing that Moscow is determined to "meet the US challenge in Vietnam by force if necessary." When asked about possible repercussions on US-USSR relations, the Soviet declared that the Vietnamese situation is "too serious to be sacrificed to any other consideration." Asserting that the Soviet Union can not allow another Socialist country to come under direct attack, he remarked that "the USSR also has a face to save."

4. In a recent conversation with the Italian deputy foreign minister, Polish Foreign Minister Rapacki expressed concern that the Soviets might be forced by the course of events "to the point of no return." He urged the Italians to press the US to negotiate. When asked whether it was true that

Peiping was not permitting the Soviets to send materiel across China to North Vietnam, Rapacki did not deny this.

5. Moscow continues its propaganda campaign denouncing alleged US use of poisonous gases. Soviet newspapers give big play to foreign reaction and note "huge protest meetings" in several cities in the USSR.

6. Pyongyang is giving heavy propaganda emphasis to its 26 March statement pledging aid and assistance to the "fraternal Vietnamese people." The central committee of the United Fatherland Front--a quasi-official propaganda organization--has called on all the people in North Korea "to be fully prepared to be mobilized at any time in case of necessity to directly assist the South Vietnamese people." They also pledged a "volunteer" force if the Viet Cong request it.



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